

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

PRESENT RELATIVE SITUATIONS

OF THE

ROYAL COLLEGES OF PHYSICIANS
AND SURGEONS

OF

EDINBURGH.

Edinburgh :

PRINTED FOR FRANCIS PILLANS, 13. HANOVER
STREET.

1821.

THE HISTORY OF THE

AMERICAN PEOPLE

FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENTS TO THE PRESENT TIME

BY JAMES OSGOOD

AND

JOHN P. KNEASS

NEW YORK: PUBLISHED BY J. OSGOOD, 15 NASSAU ST.

AND JOHN P. KNEASS, 15 NASSAU ST.

1857

THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENTS TO THE PRESENT TIME

BY JAMES OSGOOD

AND

JOHN P. KNEASS

OBSERVATIONS, &c.

THE present is regarded as an auspicious moment for agitating new measures, with a view to support the medical credit of this city ; and the common-place observations which the subject suggests, have of late been sufficiently inculcated, as applied to the appointments of our Medical School. But our medical character must not be suffered to rest on any one Chair in the University ; we expect exertions to be made, and talent to be developed, in every department.

Nor is it by our University alone, or even by our Medical School altogether, that this city ought to present an imposing character for professional accomplishments. The actual practice of medicine, as conducted in it, ought to claim a high confidence, founded on the zeal

and intelligence of the residing practitioners. The numerous pupils whom Edinburgh has sent out, are now maintaining an active competition in all parts of the civilized world. Their exertions are making rapid advances to the destruction of local authority, and the emancipation of blind confidence in all its forms; and here, as in other places, it is time that every exertion should be made to circumscribe within the narrowest possible limits the influence of mere names, and all sorts of hereditary and prescriptive advantages.

No personal observations on the characters of our present practitioners will be here insinuated. These always do much more mischief than benefit to science. They may occasionally elicit information on disputed points, by imparting to them a momentary poignancy, but they repress that constant extension of professional knowledge which would result from habitual good neighbourhood.

In order that our activity may not be accused of languishing, our first care must be to avail ourselves of the lessons of experience, by avoiding all personal hostility. It is not by despising and laughing at medical quarrels, that we shall be enabled to avoid them. They are in themselves natural, and arise out of the peculiar relations of the medical profession to

the rest of society. It is by maintaining habitual self-command, and by regarding harmony as an object worthy of some little sacrifices, that we shall obtain success in enjoying all its advantages.

A cause of mutual distance among the members of the profession, is supposed to exist in the relative situations of our two public bodies,—the College of Physicians, and the College of Surgeons. A Pamphlet appeared a few weeks ago, written in an excellent spirit, in which this evil was with some justice complained of, and a union of the Colleges proposed as a healing measure. This is a subject which calls for a few additional observations.

A division of medical duties has at different times, and on different principles, been adopted, as conducive to the more perfect discharge of the respective departments. A great line of demarcation has for a long time been observed in Europe, between the treatment of external and that of internal diseases. External diseases, and manual operations on the human body, have been comprehended under Surgery; the management of internal diseases being called, by way of eminence,—Medicine, or Physic. Pharmacy is considered as a third branch, separate from the other two. The duties of these departments, however, are so much associated, that they cannot be kept en-

tirely separate without the rigid interference of the civil power, or the commanding influence of a public opinion, well or ill founded, operating on a sense of character. Legal enactments have in most countries been made for the purpose, which are rigidly enforced under arbitrary governments ; but, in Britain, the indulgence given to the freedom of individual industry renders the execution of such laws a matter of difficulty.

The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh is invested with the sole right of treating internal diseases, and the Royal College of Surgeons with that of treating external injuries, performing surgical operations, and preparing medicines. Armed with these legal powers, the two bodies are naturally attached to their rights ; and some cause of jealousy is supposed to arise from reciprocal encroachments, made or intended by the one on the province of the other. It is conceived that all jealousy might be obviated by incorporating the bodies under one charter.

The separate existence of the two Colleges is certainly altogether inefficient for the separate exercise of their respective departments. It is well known that the members of the College of Surgeons are equally ready to treat diseases which belong to Physicians, as those which come within their own charter. A dis-

position to out-step the line of demarcation has not appeared to the same extent among the members of the College of Physicians. This has arisen from different causes. While the surgeons were not liberally educated, the attendance of physicians was necessary in all serious cases; and this practice being of considerable extent, and esteemed the most honourable, the physicians, erroneously conceiving that this acknowledged superiority should form the only distinction, became indifferent about the ordinary practice of medicine, and abstained from pharmacy and surgery as low mechanical arts. They even went so far as enact by-laws, restraining their members from interfering with these other departments. Moral principle, as a motive, was out of the question. It never was apprehended that an interference with the rights of the surgeons, to an extent equal to the encroachments made by the latter, would have been in this respect derogatory. Arguments might be fabricated to a contrary effect, and enforced by strong language, in a casual effort of literary gymnastics, but, as a principle, it never could be *bona fide* entertained in the breast of any individual.

Enjoying, however, so great advantages from the mere fastidiousness of the College of Physicians, the surgeons gradually improved in the knowledge of all branches of medicine;

and, being ready for every thing mental and manual that sick persons required, they have got into their hands a large proportion of the practice of medicine, both ordinary and extraordinary. When consultations are required, they often prefer calling in a member of their own body. Hence several graduates, intending to reside in Edinburgh, have found it advisable to enter the College of Surgeons, in preference to the other body to which their medical degree entitled them to be more particularly allied. It is not without scruple that they have thus descended to court professional employment ; but the necessity of the case has in many instances prevailed ; and by looking over the list of that College in the Almanack, we find M. D. subjoined to the names of a large proportion.

A growing disposition has appeared on the part of the Physicians, to relax from the strictness of their former etiquette, by repealing the bye-laws which place a stigma on pharmacy and surgery ; but the antiquated prejudices of some of the body, supported by a blind veneration for nominal rank, and occasionally backed by a confounding literary eloquence destitute both of tenable argument and of delicacy, has produced a temporary retardation of the efficiency of their wishes.

At the present moment, there is a greater inclination than ever to change their mode of

practice, in consequence of the necessity becoming daily more apparent ; but an extreme delicacy prevents it from being carried into immediate execution to its full extent. It is contrary to the opinions strenuously maintained by the late Dr Grégory. Some of the present seniors of the College were opposed to him on one part of that question, and reciprocal offence accidentally ensued on it. To alter their measures on the present occasion, might on their part be construed into a marked disrespect to his memory, which they are unwilling to exhibit ; or it might be imputed to a readiness to take advantage of his death, to accomplish a measure which the force of his eccentric writings, aided by his undue influence * on the public

* This influence received powerful assistance from the acclamations of such adherents of ancient etiquette, as were strangers to the state of medical practice in this city. Even here it has, among interested persons, given origin to the grossest misrepresentations. Down to the present day, we are liable to hear it said, that the measure which was then in contemplation was,—that the physicians should keep apothecaries' shops. Whether such views spring from misinformation or design, this general mention of the subject is probably sufficient to produce, in future, greater guardedness of assertion. If we could suppose that the surgeons were to join in perseveringly impressing such views, their numerous body might have a temporary influence, for the immediate extinction of which some determined energetic measures might be necessary.

mind, prevented them from doing during his life. Perhaps the one or two who agreed with him would adhere to their former views, more from the love of consistency than from continued conviction. The whole have too great a regard for the spirit of harmony, to drive a measure which would not be unanimously carried.

It is among those who have most lately joined the College, who have no concern with past disputes, and who have been most forward to testify their general respect for the memory of the late excellent Professor, that an inclination to break through former practices has been most strongly manifested. They have not yet formally expressed such sentiments; but they have compared their views with those of their brethren on another point, and have found them unanimous, that is, on their mode of attending the sick. It had always been to ascertain extent the practice, but it is now more distinctly understood, and more fully expressed, that they are not to visit merely as consulting physicians, while a patient is attended by another practitioner, but are to undertake all the ordinary duties of medical attendants, and consequently not to consider a consulting fee as due to them for each visit, but only such remuneration as is reasonably expected for ordinary attendance.

In fact, no restraint is to be henceforth considered as lying on them in this particular.

As for the obstacles which still remain unre-moved, and which are sacrifices made to the manes of antiquated modes of feeling, they will probably resist their hurtful operation by every method consistent with integrity. On entering the College, they still engage "not to keep an apothecary's shop, nor to practice pharmacy," (*i. e.* the mixing of medicines). But they can keep all the *simples* in their possession, and administer them without mixture. This it is their duty to do, especially the most powerful ones, in order to be duly provided against cases of emergency. There are many *mixtures* which do not deteriorate by keeping. They can order these in any quantity from an apothecary, keep them in this state in their possession, and give them in the requisite doses to their patients. For all *extemporaneous compounds* they can send their prescriptions to an apothecary, and can either keep an account-current with him, or let their patients do it. All this is strictly consistent with their promises, and it is incumbent on them to act in this spirit. To what degree they do so may depend on the extent of their practice, and other circumstances of convenience, but all scruples on the score of propriety are for ever done away.

They fortunately come under no obligation to abstain from surgery. Their predecessors made a bye-law, which allows them to practice it occasionally, but subjects them to the penalty of expulsion if they make it their common business. But, in the present day, it is absurd to suppose that any attempt would be made to put such a bye-law in force against any member. Probably it *could* not, as long as the College does not protect its members in the exclusive practice of medicine. Certainly there would be no greater impropriety in a member of the College of Physicians even performing the most delicate surgical operations, and giving himself out as a first-rate operator, than in a member of the other College qualifying himself, by medical experience, to become a candidate for the Chair of the Practice of Medicine in the University. But it is probably not for its own sake that any physician would at present operate with his own hands, or by those of an assistant or pupil ; it is chiefly for the sake of the medical practice with which some surgical operations are naturally associated, and which is in danger of becoming alienated by a bigotted adherence to old-fashioned restrictions.

The progress of sound views on the different departments of medicine, is well exemplified in the medical appointments of the army.

Formerly, graduates of the Universities were made physicians in the first instance, their classical and superior medical education being presumed to supersede the necessity of any term of service in a subordinate rank. But now the best academical qualifications do not exempt them from commencing their career as hospital assistants, where they become initiated in the actual practice of their profession. In this rank they practice both surgery and medicine, and it is only at an advanced step, that an exclusive exercise of the duties of either branch is assigned to any. An enlightened example is here afforded to the profession in civil life. All branches must now be well educated in the outset, (though it must be confessed, that their education still admits of radical improvement), and all of them ought to commence with those duties to which least responsibility is attached, and in which experience is most readily acquired. No young man ought to be educated for a consulting physician, or expected to act in that capacity in the beginning of his career. It is to be hoped, that for the furtherance of these ends in this city, the obnoxious bye-laws of the College of Physicians, which in practice are rapidly becoming obsolete, will soon be formally repealed. Such a measure is necessary to enable that body to comply with the de-

clared meaning of a charter, which empowers them to make such enactments as they conceive to be conducive to the interests of medicine: That for this purpose, they should virtually exclude themselves from its duties, is an anomaly which has no where a parallel. Even at the present moment, however, it must no longer be reckoned necessary for a graduate of any description, to subjoin the designation of surgeon to his name, in order to be understood to practice as an ordinary attendant of the sick. It must be understood, unless formally expressed otherwise by the individual, that without this addition, he undertakes medical practice with equal freedom and generality as any surgeon, and that, whatever medicines or common surgical operations are wanted, the physician will either provide such himself, or direct the patients where they may be obtained, without committing them with any other medical practitioner.

It is not conceivable that resistance can be made to this line of conduct in any quarter whatever. It cannot be supposed, that any member of the College of Surgeons, would, by indirect obloquy applied to individuals, try to throw discredit on those to whom they have themselves set the example. The physicians who are most strenuous in this cause must not

apprehend that they shall be accused of undue forwardness. The opposite fault has hitherto attached to them. If they continue to court, in this particular, the ambiguous praise of modesty, they are sure to become the victims of neglect.

The full effect of such a change of measures ought to be tried, before any union of the Colleges is attempted. The members are not yet ripe for a union. It is liberal to keep the object in view. But there is reason to think that it is regarded with aversion by some members of both bodies. Some of the physicians certainly think unfavourably of it, as amounting to an extinction of their own body, and a resignation of their establishment to the College of Surgeons. Probably some members of the other College are so tenacious of their property, as to entertain an unwillingness to admit the physicians to a full participation of the advantages of their richly endowed corporation, (including a provision for widows, which the physicians at present have not), unless on the condition of an actual pecuniary advance. But the physicians, with the present definite understanding on their mode of practice, and still more, if they will cease to repress the functions of their members, and to discourage intrants by an incredible apathy in their

associated capacity, are entitled to look forward to a speedy improvement in their finances. This end is to be obtained, not by making what can be properly called encroachments on the rights of others, but by using the necessary means for retaining their own share of medical practice taken *in cumulo*, which has by a series of accidents been subjected to natural encroachments on the part of others. In the present juncture, their most prudent proceeding will be, to wait for a time the practical issue of a liberal change of sentiments, after which they will be enabled to form a more correct estimate of the respective advantages possessed by the two bodies in their separate state, and take such steps as will be necessary, on principles of equity, for consolidating more fully the interests and the exertions of the whole medical faculty of this city. During that interval, old prejudices will die away, and opinions more correct in themselves, and more suited to the spirit of the age, will gradually become universal.

FINIS.

EDINBURGH:

Printed by JOHN PILLANS.



